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North suburban mayors Monday received some hope - and advice - regarding solutions to transportation matters.

A fiber optic network planned in Lake County promises to offer real-life help to motorists, while unanimous political backing for a \$1.2 billion suburb-to-suburb rail line could ease gridlock in Cook County, according to U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk.

The Highland Park Republican also told mayors from Lake and Cook counties to closely monitor evolving proposals for a super agency that would combine various transit and planning organizations.

Chicago interests could be trying to dilute suburban say and access to transit money even as commuting in the suburbs outpaces that going into the city, he said.

"If we have suburb-to-suburb commuting, we need suburb to suburb solutions," he told a gathering of 14 suburban leaders in his biannual mayor's summit at a Highland Park hotel.

During the informal two-hour session, Kirk updated mayors on a range of issues, including the ongoing train horn debate, the proposed cleanup of Waukegan Harbor, concerns about mercury pollution and the need to target club drugs.

Kirk talked about many transportation matters. He said there was "complete bipartisan unity" among Illinois legislators in Washington, D.C., in pursuing federal transportation funds for the STAR line - connecting suburbs on the Northwest Tollway from O'Hare International Airport to Hoffman Estates and then south to Joliet.

That project will be competing against about 5,300 funding requests from members of Congress in the next six-year transportation bill. The Senate has passed its version at \$318 billion and the House is scheduled to take up the matter in the near future.

"It's answering the suburb-to-suburb connection," said Arlington Heights Mayor Arlene Mulder. "We're all in unity and that's amazing."

In Lake County, \$3 million in federal funds have been secured for the Intelligent Transportation System. This system of fiber optic cables, running out of a traffic center in Libertyville, will combine high-speed data and cameras.

The system will synchronize lights based on the time of day, weather and other conditions to provide motorists with real-time information and alternatives and improve traffic flow. Kirk said Congress is considering \$500,000 for a similar system along the Lake-Cook Road corridor.

The mayors agreed a federal \$4 million estimate to upgrade all Chicago area train crossings to avoid a requirement that trains blow their horns was unrealistic.

Upgrading crossings would cost about \$1 million just in Northbrook, for example, one official said.

"I need input from you guys," Kirk said. "At this point we're looking at specific data, how it affects the budget of each community." The deadline for public comment is April 19.

Regarding the environment, Kirk said a pending cleanup of Waukegan Harbor would clear the path for development of 1,500 lakefront acres and unlock \$800 million in new real estate investment.